

Old Time Al Building

Galveston, Galveston County, Texas

LESS NO. 101-159

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84-GIALV
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**ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...**

PROGRAMS
WITHIN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District # 6 Tex2

Architectural Buildings Survey
Russell P. Prince, District Officer,
401 Main Street, Houston, Texas

HABS
KEY
84-GALV.
12

OLD FEDERAL BUILDING
Galveston, Galveston County, Texas

Owner U. S. Government

Date of Erection 1958 to 1961

Architect U. S. Government

Builder Federal Government

Present Condition Good

Number of Stories Two

Materials of Construction Brick, painted colonial color with white trim. Iron with painted steel on north, also greater portion of brick, although a few of the brick were made at Clear Creek.

Other Existing Records Unknown

Additional Data: This is the first Federal constructed building in Texas. It was built by Chas. F. Beck and David D. Evans who were U. S. senators from Texas during the middle 50's secured an appropriation from the Federal Government for \$100,000 for the construction of this building to house the Post Office, Customs House and Federal Court. Construction was begun in 1958 and the building was turned over to Federal Government January 1, 1961. The Federal Government occupied the building about six weeks when Confederate Government took it over and occupied it until the Federal troops recaptured Galveston. However, there are no records showing how the Confederate Government ever held court in the building as they would have no lines to court in early in 1862 and continued to use until the end of the war. Several Federal courts were tried in the old building before it was abandoned by the original occupants for long periods. It is now occupied by several minor Federal departments.

This building was located too small for increased volume of staff office functions. A new building had been erected in 1958 (This has been razed and a new building is being constructed.)

For some cause that I cannot explain this building just falls short of being excellent. It is a magnificent building. It cracks of being a Beaux arts problem. It is four sided and each side reflected with mirror like perfection.

Rev. Dec 1 '36 TFW

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Addendum to:

HABS No. TX-259

U.S. Custom House (Federal Building)
Southeast corner of 20th and Post Office Streets
Galveston
Galveston County
Texas
as recorded in 1936

HABS
TEX
84-GALV,
12-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S CUSTOM HOUSE (Federal Building)

HABS
TEX
84-GALV
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HABS No. TX-259

An addendum to:
U.S. Custom House
S.E. corner of 20th and Post Office Streets
Galveston
Galveston County
Texas

Location: Southeast corner of 20th and Post Office Streets,
Galveston, Galveston County, Texas.

Present Owner
and Occupant: United States Government.

Present Use: United States Government offices.

Significance: The Custom House building, an outstanding example of the Classical Revival style, is architecturally distinguished and important historically. Galveston was the leading seaport and commercial city in Texas during the 19th century and most of the imported commercial goods entered the state through this port. The business community of Galveston, composed chiefly of wholesale concerns, furnished the trade goods for all of Texas, Indian Territory, and parts of Louisiana and New Mexico.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: 1857-61. The original contract was awarded in 1857. The building, however, was delayed due to changes in plan and was not completed until 1861.
2. Architect: The design of the building resulted from negotiations between the original contractors, C.B. Cluskey and Company, and the U.S. Corps of Engineers office in the Treasury Department of the U.S. Government. It is not known who was responsible for the design but the final working drawings were executed by the Corps of Engineers Office.

Ammi B. Young, architect of the original plans, was the first supervising architect of the office of Construction of the Treasury Department of the United States, and was responsible for a number of distinguished government buildings during his tenure.

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Charles B. Cluskey and E.W. Moore, contractors for the building, were important in their own right. Moore was at one time Commodore of the Navy of the Republic of Texas. Cluskey was a noted architect of Savannah, Georgia and later Washington, D.C.
4. Original plan and construction: In 1855 the U.S. Congress appropriated the sum of \$100,000 to build a Custom House building for Galveston, Texas. Plans and specifications were prepared by the supervising architect of the office of Construction of the U.S. Government Treasury Department who was at that time Ammi Burnham Young. Several bid submissions were required before the Department secured the proper degree of formality of presentation and on the third bidding date, February 12, 1857, the contract was awarded to the contractors, C.B. Cluskey of Washington and E.W. Moore of Galveston. Their bid was for \$869,723.93. This began a series of difficulties and problems that beset the whole building history of the Custom House.

Even before this date certain problems had arisen. In January 1857 a petition, or "memorial", had been drawn up among the architects, public officers and citizens of Galveston and Texas who protested the original plans. This memorial which was forwarded to Texas representatives in Congress further endorsed a proposed plan change that Cluskey and Moore had presented that called for extending the building and thereby providing additional interior space. Objections to Young's plans seem justified as they dealt with specific functional problems of the design. There was not, first of all, sufficient room provided by the plan to carry out the functions of the Custom House and Post Office. Second, in the eyes of Galvestonians, the rear of the building, the north facade, faced onto one of the "finest" streets in the city. Third, Young's design, a three-story structure, had exterior galleries connected by external stairs. This was objected to as being inconvenient during winter weather. In addition, there were several other minor objections.

Cluskey and Moore, however, with several delays, proceeded to execute the original plan. By March 24, 1858 the trenches for the foundations had been excavated and much of the building material conveyed to the site. Cluskey and Moore were still attempting to have their proposed changes authorized by Congress. There was much concern that the contractors were less than serious about executing their original contract. The feeling was that they intended only to speculate on the contract and to sell it to others for a consideration and the numerous delays in the work seemed sufficient evidence of this fact at the time.

By the summer of 1858 the Treasury Department was studying the new proposals submitted by Moore, but apparently they were left pending because by January 1859 the Engineer in charge, A.H. Bowman, was requesting iron work bids of several New York firms on the basis of the original plans of 1857.

In that month, however, the Department, dissatisfied by the contractors continuing delays (the first story was not then erected) assumed responsibility for the work and took over the job. On January 20 the Secretary of the Treasury then ordered all work to stop.

At that very time a joint resolution had finally been developed and was being pushed through Congress to authorize the Secretary of the Treasury to make the changes as called for in the petition encouraged by Cluskey and Moore in January 1858. The resolution finally passed both houses of Congress by February 9, 1859.

New plans were then prepared by the Corps of Engineers based on the proposals of Cluskey and Moore, but other difficulties arose with the contractors. Finally, on June 19, 1860, Moore signed the new contract alone as Cluskey refused to enter into a new agreement. Moore immediately sold the contract for \$5,000 consideration to the Boston firm of Blaisdell and Emerson.

Work was begun in earnest then, the old foundations taken up and relaid according to new plan. By December 1, 1860 the walls were going up and all was proceeding smoothly. On March 27, 1861 the building was formally turned over to the U.S. Government.

The building was then taken over by the Confederate Government for the duration of the war. During that time the building suffered some deterioration from the action of the salt air on its metal parts, particularly the corrugated iron roof which was also damaged in two places by shot or shell. A.B. Mullett, inspecting the building in 1865, made these observations. He also recommend repainting and replastering as well as total replacement of the roof.

5. Alterations and additions: At present the building has undergone the latest in a number of renovations in this century. It is currently the responsibility of the General Services Administration and serves as a Post Office substation, Federal Court and offices for military recruiters.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Original architectural drawings: Original architectural drawings that were not used in the construction are in Plans of Public Buildings in Course of Construction for the United States of America under the Direction of the Secretary of Treasury, Including Specifications. Washington: 5 volumes, 1855-56. These are available at the National Archives, Washington, D.C.
2. Primary and unpublished sources:

Washington, D.C. National Archives. Records Service. Records of The Public Buildings Service.

3. Secondary and published sources:

Galveston News. January 17, 1857.

Wodehouse, Lawrence. "The Custom House, Galveston, Texas, 1857-61, by Ammi B. Young," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, March 1966, Vol. XXV, No.1, pp. 64-67.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director
Galveston Architecture Inventory
March 21, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Custom House is a two story masonry structure in the Classical Revival style. It is a rectangular building with recessed galleries on the north and south elevations and a projecting gallery on the west.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is presently in sound condition due to the recent renovation by the General Services Administration. Unfortunately the walls which have been painted for a number of years were sandblasted and a large percentage of the brick have rough open faces. Silicone has been applied but the character of the surface has suffered.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building measures 80' x 106' and stand two stories high.
2. Foundations: The foundations are stepped brick grade beams.
3. Wall construction: The walls are solid brick laid without headers. They are for the most part a red-brown color, hard fired unit; however, tan-colored bricks appear scattered randomly throughout the fabric, but concentrated mainly at corners and jambs of openings. From the variegated appearance it seems evident that the building was intended to be painted or possibly these bricks were later replacements.
4. Structural system: All walls are load bearing. Openings are spanned by lintels.

5. Porches: A side gallery projects slightly on the face of the west facade. In addition two recessed galleries are located on the north and south elevations. These galleries are composed of cast-iron columns supporting a second floor and gallery roof.

The columns and other cast-iron work are of the same design as the original architects' drawings. They were cast in New York and shipped to Galveston for erection. Those on the ground floor are of the Ionic order and those above of the Corinthian order.

The lower columns rest on a stylobate of granite and those above are mounted on classical pedestals. A cast-iron balustrade encloses the upper gallery.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The exterior doors are wood with a glass central panel of nine lights and a single molded lower panel. Above the transom bar is a double casement window. The jambs, lintels and molded trim are cast-iron.
- b. Windows: Windows are casements, six lights per panel, wood sash that open inward. Above the transom bar, as over the door openings, is a small two-over-two light casement transom. Sashes are again cast-iron. A classical cornice is located over each opening.

7. Roof: Hipped roof is new; replaced in 1961. Presently covered with roll shingles.

- C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The building is "H" shaped in plan. On the ground floor the Post Office department occupies the western half. This consists of a shallow lobby entered by one of three doors on the west facade, and a large mail room. The east half of the building is divided into offices. The stair hall is in the center and reached by the center door on the north porch.

On the upper floor a central hall divides the western hall with offices flanking. The eastern half is occupied by the Federal Courtroom.

2. Stairway: A central stairway of cast-iron provides access to the second floor.
3. Floor: Lower level floors are tile and cement; those above are wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster throughout.

5. Doors: Interior doors are wood, three molded panels; transom above.
6. Trim: Wood trim surrounds all openings.
7. Hardware: Modern hardware.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Modern heating equipment.
 - b. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: The building occupies the northwest quarter of Block 439, and the southeast corner of Post Office and 20th Streets.
2. Enclosure: A fine cast-iron fence encloses the property.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director
Galveston Architecture Inventory
March 21, 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Galveston Survey was jointly sponsored by the National Park Service, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation and the Galveston Historical Foundation Inc., and developed under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). This structure was measured and drawn in the summer of 1967 under the direction of Professor Melvin M. Rotsch, project supervisor (Texas A&M), John C. Garner, Jr., architect (University of Texas), by student architects Michael D. Casey (University of Houston), Larry D. Johnston (Kansas State University), James E. Murphy (Texas A&M) and Gerald R. Rapp (Texas A&M). The historical data was written by John C. Garner, Jr., acting as the Director of the Galveston Architecture Inventory. The written data was edited for transmittal to the Library of Congress in the summer of 1980 by Kent R. Newell of the HABS staff. The photographs were taken by Allen Stross in the summer of 1967.